

**Statement of Jim Hughes
Deputy Director, Bureau of Land Management**

**Before the
Senate Energy Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests**

**on
S. 714 -- Douglas County, Oregon, Land Conveyance**

June 4, 2003

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the position of the Department of the Interior on S. 714. This bill would provide for the conveyance of a 68-acre parcel of public domain land in Douglas County, Oregon, to the county in order to improve management of and recreational access to the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area.

The Department of the Interior supports the goals of S. 714, but would like to work with the Subcommittee on certain changes to the bill.

Currently, the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Coos Bay District administers this land, which is located just south of where the Umpqua River empties into the Pacific Ocean, near Winchester Bay, in Douglas County, Oregon. The land is bordered on the west by public lands withdrawn for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and on the south, by the Umpqua Lighthouse State Park and various private lands. The Umpqua Lighthouse State Park is located less than a mile from the Salmon Harbor on Winchester Bay, and the lighthouse and adjacent museum are operated and maintained by the Douglas County Parks Department and the U.S. Coast Guard. There is no other BLM-managed land in the vicinity.

The 68.8-acre tract to be conveyed under S. 714 is isolated and difficult for the BLM to manage. It was identified in the Coos Bay District's 1995 Resource Management Plan as suitable for disposal.

Off-highway vehicle riders use this parcel for access to the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area because it is one of the few free access points to the Area. Recreational access across this tract to the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area can be managed more appropriately by Douglas County.

However, consistent with longstanding practice, we believe that the government should receive market value for the land being transferred out of public ownership. We would also like the opportunity to work with the Subcommittee to address technical issues including: clarifications to the reversionary clause, acknowledgment of existing rights-of-way, and corrections to the map referred to section 1(a).

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

Proposed amendments to S. 714 (Add FMV change)

1. Characterization of the 68.8 acre parcel

Section 1(a)(2) PARCEL –

Page 2, line 6: delete “real property”, and insert in lieu thereof “land”.

It is public domain land, not acquired real property

2. Map

Page 2, lines 9-11: delete “Umpqua River Lighthouse and Coast Guard Museum Master Plan Study, dated April 17, 2002,” and insert in lieu thereof “S.714, Douglas County, Oregon, Land Conveyance, May 21, 2003.”

3. Reversionary Interest

Section 1(c) REVERSIONARY INTEREST –Delete this subsection.

The BLM's Coos Bay District Resource Management Plan identifies this parcel as being suitable for disposal by exchange or other means, pursuant to Section 203(a) of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (90 Stat. 2750). The BLM has no future management interest in the land as it is an isolated piece of land that is difficult to manage. The BLM has no plans to develop the parcel for recreational purposes and would not be interested in having the property returned. The return of the parcel to federal ownership would not be in the public interest.

4. Acknowledgment of existing rights-of-way.

Present encumbrances on the parcel must be acknowledged to insure continued use for the purpose for which they were originally authorized. These encumbrances include a road right-of-way to the U.S. Coast Guard for the Umpqua River Jetty, a road right-of-way to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for dredge range structures, and a buried power line authorized to the U.S. Coast Guard. As authorized by Section 1(e), the conveyance document from the Secretary will include recognition of these existing valid rights; however, we believe S.714 should explicitly recognize valid existing rights.